

CANADIAN HEALTH
COALITION

**HEALTH +
HOPE LOBBY
2023:**

**WHAT WE HEARD
AND WHAT'S NEXT**

Participants of the Canadian Health Coalition's Health and Hope Lobby 2023 met with more than 60 parliamentarians in person on March 28, and shortly thereafter via teleconference.



Edmonton-Griesbach NDP MP Blake Desjarlais (second from right) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, Pauline Worsfold, RN, Chair of the Canadian Health Coalition, Lauren Elcheson, Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA/NUPGE), Judy Lederer, Friends of Medicare, and Linda McLaren, United Church of Canada.

Lobby teams were asked to complete report-back forms following each meeting. Here is a snapshot of what we heard based on the information on 33 forms received and comments by participants at the debrief session held on March 29. The compilation of the report-back forms is followed by summaries of what is happening in the provinces shared by the provincial health coalitions and lobby participants.

WHAT WE HEARD

QUESTIONS	ALL LOBBIED	NDP MPS LOBBIED	LIBERAL MPS LOBBIED	CONSERVATIVE MPS LOBBIED	BQ MPS LOBBIED	SENATORS LOBBIED
	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
1. Did the MP/Senator understand the issues?	29/3	4/0	10/1	7/1	1/0	7/1
2. Did the MP/Senator support universal pharmacare?	22/11	4/0	9/2	2/6	0/1	7/1
3. Did the MP/Senator support our other public health care priorities?	22/10	4/0	9/2	2/5	0/1	7/2
4. Did the MP/Senator make suggestions/raise concerns?	32/1	4/0	11/1	9/0	1/0	7/0

Summary of NDP MP meetings

NDP MPs strongly support universal public pharmacare and are opposed to privatization of health care. They fear some Liberals are not taking the Confidence and Supply Agreement seriously. They worry about the interference of big pharma and private insurance companies in passing universal public pharmacare.



Left-to-right: Pauline Worsfold, RN, Chair of the Canadian Health Coalition, Don Davies, NDP Health Critic, Jason MacLean, National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), and Steven Staples, Canadian Health Coalition.

NDP MP Blake Desjarlais representing Edmonton Griesbach argued we don't have to wait for funding and a formulary to pass pharmacare legislation. He worried the Liberals stalling on pharmacare will result in it being an election issue because the NDP will withdraw from its agreement with the Liberals, risking the minority government falling on a confidence vote.



Winnipeg Centre NDP MP Leah Gazan (second from left) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, Kyle Ross, Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU), Chris Gallaway, Friends of Medicare and Juliet Bushi, Saskatchewan Health Coalition.



Courtenay—Alberni NDP MP Gord Johns (second from left) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, Leslie Gaudette, Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC, Charmaine Fines, British Columbia General Employees' Union (BCGEU), Mary Huang, advocate for seniors and long-term care, and Richard Ziemianski, BCGEU.

Summary of Liberal MP meetings

The Canadian Health Coalition met with senior policy staff in two ministers' offices: Health Minister Jean Yves Duclos and Seniors Minister Kamal Khera. Minister Duclos's staff relayed the office is still working on pharmacare legislation and evaluating options. They explained the approach deserves careful consideration because of the complex nature of the program which requires cooperation from the provinces and territories to be ultimately successful. Minister Khera's staff explained the Health Ministry is the lead on health files related to seniors, and the Minister was currently working on delivering on the government's commitment to increase the wages of Personal Support Workers (PSWs) to \$25 per hour, announced on March 1, 2023.

Several Liberal MPs said they support the idea of universal pharmacare, but they are not sure how and when it will be achieved. They said it requires negotiation with the provinces. Dr. Helena Jazcek, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Receiver General for Canada, told lobby participants that pharmacare legislation is likely not happening this year. She expressed her concern over for-profit care and said she was in favour of public health care. Other Liberal MPs noted pharmacare is not discussed in Parliament and has fallen down the priorities list, but that pharmacare will still happen.

Some Liberal MPs also denounced the moves of Premiers like Doug Ford for not being good provincial partners, for not spending surpluses on health care, and for privatizing health care. Adam van Koeverden, MP for Milton, said no one should have to pay for health care out-of-pocket and that a non-profit system is the best way to ensure this.

Not all Liberal MPs were supportive of our demands. Ken Hardie, Liberal MP for Fleetwood-Port Kells in British Columbia, said he supported co-pays/deductibles or a charge for services to "minimize abuse of the system." He argued pharmaceutical companies will continue to charge a lot and will discriminate against Canada in trade negotiations, if we have a universal public pharmacare program.



Liberal MP Ken Hardie (second from left) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, (left-to-right) Kane Tse, Health Sciences Association, Barb Nederpal, Hospital Employees' Union, CUPE British Columbia, and Emma Lui, CUPE National.

On pharmacare, at least two Liberal MPs recommended lobbying key Liberal MPs in the Atlantic provinces. According to Jenica Atwin, Liberal MP for Fredericton, pharmacare is being discussed with the Liberal New Brunswick caucus “because of the growing senior population.”



Liberal MP Jenica Atwin (second from left) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, (left-to-right), Emilio Rodriguez, Citizens for Public Justice, Nikolas Barry-Shaw, Council of Canadians, Chantal Ricard, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), and Tracy Glynn, Canadian Health Coalition.

Liberal MPs also encouraged us to lobby members of the Standing Committee on Health (HESA). One Liberal MP argued CHC should ask HESA to do a study on our issues with a goal of putting forward recommendations to the house.



Liberal MP Salma Zahid (second from left) with Canadian Health Coalition lobbyists, (left-to-right), Christa Walker, Ontario Public Service Employees Union - Hospital Professionals Division (OPSEU HPD), Jason MacLean, National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), and Barry Thorsteinson, National Pensioners Federation.

Ya'ara Saks, MP for York Centre, understood the importance of early preventative care leading to overall lower costs to health care. She supported comprehensive health teams in rural and remote communities. Having grown up partly in Israel and as chair of the Canada-Israel Committee, she is knowledgeable of Israel's public health care system and champions it but also recognizes there is no perfect equitable system.

Of note - Pam Damoff, former Parliamentary Secretary of Health in 2019, said she is opposed to privatization and has written Trudeau and Duclos to voice her opposition. She was complimentary of CASA and Don Davies, the NDP Health Critic.

“I am a conduit,” said Charles Sousa, Liberal MP for Mississauga-Lake Shore, and chair of the Magellan Community Foundation, when referring to his willingness to listen and bring forward our concerns.

Summary of Conservative MP meetings

Conservative MPs largely voiced their concerns about the costs of having a universal pharmacare program with only one stating their outright opposition: “Taxpayers can’t pay for everything.” They expressed concern about pharmacare failing and about certain drugs being left out. They felt government can’t be trusted to manage the program and wanted an “outcome-based system and not just spending.”

Clifford Small, Conservative MP for Coast of Bays-Central-Notre Dame, Newfoundland and Labrador, was an outlier. He understood pharmacare would mean long-term savings with bulk buying and preventative downstream costs.

“We have Medicare for everyone but what is the good of that if we don’t have drug coverage for all,” said Small.

A couple of Conservative MPs felt big pharma had too much power and Pierre Poilievre would crack down on big pharma.

Some Conservative MPs said they would support pharmacare legislation. Clifford Small said he would support it, if it is a stand-alone bill, while Alex Ruff, MP for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, said, he would support it if there is support for it from his riding. Similar to what some Liberal MPs told us, Chris Lewis, MP for Essex in Ontario, said pharmacare is “not discussed in parliament. There is no debate.”

Ben Lobb, MP for Huron-Bruce, was named as a possible ally as was Dr. Stephen Ellis, MP for Cumberland in Nova Scotia. However, those who met with Dr. Ellis found the vice-chair of HESA to not to be sympathetic. Dr. Ellis was especially concerned about the government inability to pay for universal pharmacare. “We will have to agree to disagree,” responded Dr. Ellis to points raised during the lobby meeting.

Several Conservative MPs mentioned their support for their party’s proposed Blue Seal program. They said it would alleviate staffing shortages in health care by facilitating internationally-trained health care professionals entering Canada’s health care workforce.

Conservative MPs were concerned about “the disaster in long-term care homes” and the role of private providers, the quality of life of seniors, and the state of home care.

Chantal Richard, a PIPSC nurse practitioner in a federal prison in Miramichi, noted the discrepancy in federal vs provincial health worker pay. Richard Bragdon, Conservative MP for Tobique in New Brunswick known for his work on recidivism, found this shocking.

On privatization, James Bezan, MP for Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman in Manitoba, said France was an example to follow because of their mix of public and private.

Fort McMurray-Cold Lake MP Laila Goodbridge said she sees the same number of people for and against privatization. She said that how Liberals have handled dental care shows they can't do pharmacare right. She feels that pharmacare can't be done in five years. "Private health care will always exist because people are people and have different values," said Goodbridge.



Conservative MP Laila Goodbridge (centre) with lobbyists, (left-to-right), Alyssa Pretty, Friends of Medicare, Linda McLaren, United Church of Canada, Maisie Baldwin, Unifor Local 8300, and Katrina Peterson, Unifor Local 324.

Summary of the one Bloc Québécois MP meeting

Luc Thériault, Bloc Québécois MP for Montcalm and vice-chair of HESA, met with Keith Newman with Congress of the Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) and Eric Massey with the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) for two hours. Thériault is not interested in programs foisted on it by the federal government, including universal public pharmacare, but was open to a discussion about it. He is worried that pharmacare will upset the pharmaceutical drug "ecosystem," and result in the drug industry cutting back on clinical trials in Québec. He is also strongly opposed to any strings attached to federal money sent to Québec.

Summary of Senator meetings

Senators had mixed views on health care. Senators who are doctors are supporting a more robust public health care. Others with corporate backgrounds touted privatization and public-private partnerships.

“Don’t take your foot off the gas. This is health care time,” said one of the senators that form a health care coalition of senators who met with our lobbyists. These senators included Dr. Gigi Osler, a physician, Sharon Burey, a pediatrician, and Senator Dennis Patterson, a lawyer.

Senator Dr. Stan Kutcher, a well-known psychiatrist in his field, expressed concerned about long-term care. He wants long-term care regulated and accredited like in public hospitals. He agrees universal pharmacare keeps patients out of the hospital. He wants us to amplify our message. “There are six doctors who are senators. We understand this, the others don’t,” said Dr. Kutcher.



Senator Dr. Stan Kutcher (second from left) with lobbyists, (left-to-right), Christa Walker, Ontario Public Service Employees Union - Hospital Professionals Division (OPSEU HPD), Jason MacLean, National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), and Barry Thorsteinson, National Pensioners Federation.

Other senators argued for privatization or admitted to not knowing enough about health care to have a position on pharmacare. One senator wanted more information on the most used drugs.

“Government doesn’t have money to build new institutions,” said Senator Sarabjit Marwah, and former vice chairman and chief operating officer of Scotia Bank. The former board member of the C.D. Howe Institute also blamed the doctor shortage on women wanting to work less.

Senators are also expressed support for accreditation of skilled immigrants and were concerned about health care workers.

Senator Mary Jane McCallum, a dentist who has provided dental care to Indigenous communities in Manitoba, expressed concern MAID would be offered to people with medicine becoming too expensive.

“The work of the Canadian Health Coalition is terrific,” said Senator Peter Boehm who sits on the Senate’s Finance Committee. Boehm noted he had read the Hoskins report with great interest. He was especially concerned about shortages in dental care professionals, for-profits harming long-term care and standards for autism care. He expressed concern for underpaid personal support workers and how newcomers are filling these positions that are “not generous in terms of wages.” He encouraged us to meet with the other doctors and health care professionals in Senate, namely Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia who opened a clinic in Twillingate, Newfoundland and knows the challenges of delivering remote care.



After a day of lobbying, lobby participants enjoyed a reception hosted by NDP MP Don Davies. Left-to-right: Leo Broderick, PEI Health Coalition, and Linda Silas, president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

WHAT'S NEXT

The provincial health coalitions and other lobby participants report on what's happening in their provinces --

West to east -

BC Health Coalition is working to prepare for a response to the Cambie Case and working to challenge user fees and extra billing in virtual health care. They invited everyone to future meetings of the Cambie Case allies.

Friends of Medicare in Alberta has an active pharmacare working group. They are pushing back against privatization. Alberta is following Saskatchewan's privatization model. They are also working on social determinants of health, including housing and migrant rights. There is a provincial election this year. They have been actively opposing paid-plasma collection too.

Saskatchewan Health Coalition reported a similar situation to Manitoba and Alberta. Long-term care is a key concern. They have been working with the Saskatchewan Federal of Labour, oral health and seniors groups to promote public health care over private health care. They sent postcards to MPs. They are not surprised that no Saskatchewan MP accepted our meeting requests.

Manitoba Health Coalition: It's an election year in Manitoba. The Manitoba Health Coalition is working with allies to put together asks for the election. There has been an increase in privatization including in long-term care. Air ambulance privatization caused a patient death. Working on social determinants of health.



Thomas Linner, Manitoba Health Coalition, (standing) reporting on the state of public health care in Manitoba.

Ottawa Health Coalition is working on a million votes opposing privatization.

Fiona Baily with SEIU reported that they are working with community allies to support accessibility to health care for all, and to support health care workers. The CLC convention is highlighting “a day in the life” of a personal support worker. They have met with Trudeau and are pushing for a higher minimum wage.

Nova Scotia Health Coalition noted that the Tim Houston government has made some improvements to health care, but mistakes are being made such as unequal bonuses to health care workers. Virtual care through Maple is being implemented differently in Nova Scotia than in other provinces. They have been engaged in the actions against paid-plasma collection. Some public-private partnership (P3) projects are not working out as expected.

In Quebec, Keith Newman, Gatineau resident and Canadian Health Coalition board member representing the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC), reported the Bloc Québécois is just parroting the Québec government’s position. On pharmacare, the BQ competes against NDP.



Rita Morbia, Inter Pares, and Keith Newman, Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC), at the Health and Hope Reception on March 28, 2023.

Future opportunities for defending and expanding public health care

Lobby participants noted the following opportunities to engage on public health care priorities.

Pharmacare Townhalls with Avi Lewis by the Council of Canadians

- APRIL 20-23: Alberta Federation of Labour Convention
- APRIL 25-28: USW 55th Annual Convention in Toronto
- MAY 1: International Workers' Day
- MAY 4-6: Liberal Convention in Ottawa
- MAY 8-12: Canadian Labour Congress Convention in Montreal
- MAY 26-27: Ontario Health Coalition Referendum
- MAY 25-26: Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) Annual General Meeting
- MAY 29: Alberta Election
- JUNE 5-9: Canadian Federation of Nurses Union Convention in Charlottetown
- JUNE 15-16: Canadian Blood Services Annual General Meeting

- JULY 10-12:** Council of Federations in Winnipeg

- AUGUST 15-19:** Unifor Canadian Council in Halifax

- SEPTEMBER:** Liberal Atlantic Caucus in Cape Breton

- SEPTEMBER 26-27:** National Pensioners Federation Convention in Ottawa

- OCTOBER 5:** Manitoba Election

- OCTOBER 13-15:** NDP Convention in Hamilton

- OCTOBER 17:** International Day to Eradicate Racism

- OCTOBER 18-20:** United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) Annual General Meeting

- OCTOBER 26-28:** Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) Convention

- OCTOBER 22-27:** CUPE Convention in Quebec City



Pat Van Horne, United Steelworkers, and Lindsay Mathysen, NDP MP for London-Fanshawe, at the Health and Hope Reception on March 28, 2023.

Stay tuned

Health Ministers Meeting

2024 Canadian Health Coalition Lobby!



Left-to-right: Dr. Robert Barkwell and Alexandra Rose with the Nova Scotia Health Coalition at the Health and Hope reception, March 28, 2023.